

Food Security Update - August 10, 2001

Coverage period: July 10 – August 10, 2001

Highlights

- The Aweil Counties (Bahr-el-Ghazal Region), Leech State and Ruweng County (Upper Nile Region), and Kapoeta County (Eastern Equatoria Region) remain highly food insecure. This is mainly due to conflict and insecurity, which are hampering relief efforts, and food scarcity, given the hunger period. The large numbers of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in these areas further exacerbate the problem. The IDPs is the group most vulnerable to food insecurity.
- Reports by NGOs continue to indicate an increase in the admissions of malnourished children in the feeding centers. Morbidity, rather than inadequate food intake, is currently a major factor contributing to malnutrition. The reality of very limited health care in southern Sudan and poor sanitary conditions continues to undermine efforts by NGOs to raise nutrition standards. Concerted efforts are therefore required to provide medical services, especially in areas not served by health NGOs, educate the public on good hygiene practices, and improve existing water facilities in most affected locations.
- Crop performance is mixed across the region, according to field reports. While crop performance is good and yields are likely to be high in Western Equatoria and Lakes Regions, poor yields are already reported from parts of Eastern Equatoria Region. In parts of Bahr-el-Ghazal and Upper Nile Regions, crop performance is currently good, but rainfall volumes need to be monitored given that low-lying areas in these regions are prone to seasonal flooding. Waterlogging may hurt crop production in these areas.
- Heavy rains that began in June continued into the second dekad of July in parts of Bahr-el-Ghazal Region and the third dekad in Upper Nile Region. However, below-average cumulative rains were experienced in most parts of southern Sudan during the month. With the exception of June, the semi-arid areas of Kapoeta County, Yei, and Juba Counties have received below-normal rains since the season began in early March. Using the Normalized Difference Vegetative Index (NDVI) as a proxy for crop production could indicate below-normal crop production in the affected areas.

1. Food-Security Conditions and Prospects

1.1. Current Food-Security Status

Field reports and assessments continue to provide a framework for understanding the food-security situation in the different regions. Determinants of current food security status include the presence of conflict and insecurity, harvest status, and availability of food access options, including food aid distribution. Figure 1 depicts the current food security status of the various counties.

Equatoria Region

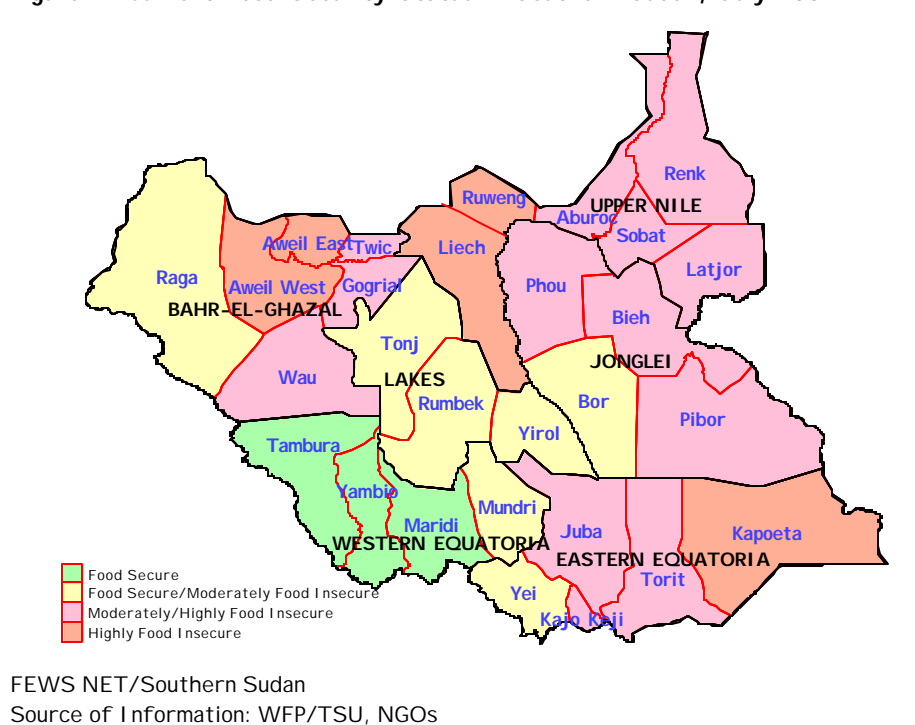
Harvesting has reportedly begun in parts of the Equatoria Region, consequently improving the food-security situation. In Magwi County¹, persistent attacks by Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) continue to cause population displacements within the county. Most of the displaced people reportedly were not able to cultivate as their inputs were looted. Those who managed to cultivate had their crops uprooted. The displaced are currently faced with the grim reality of another year of no crop production. Catholic Relief Services (CRS) has been responding to the plight of the displaced by giving them “seed protection” half-rations since February. CRS is currently seeking permission from USAID to use its contingency stocks for further interventions in the affected areas. Insecurity and access difficulties remain a challenge in providing assistance to these people.

Bahr-el-Ghazal Region

Findings from the multiagency assessment in Raga County during early July depict a population still able to meet its food needs by consuming food reserves from the last harvest, despite insecurity and displacements within the county. In Aweil East and West Counties, reports of severe food shortages persist, exacerbated by insecurity that hampers relief efforts. Similar shortages persist in other counties in the region, which remain moderately food insecure, but with pockets of highly food insecure locations.

Given that planting began late, in June/July instead of May, harvesting is not expected to begin until late September/early October. Consequently, the vulnerable

Figure 1: Current Food Security Status in Southern Sudan, July 2001



¹ Administrative boundaries of this county not yet included in the southern Sudan maps.

populations will have to rely on food aid, wild foods, and fish (for those with fishing equipment). The IDPs remain the most vulnerable as some did not even manage to cultivate before fleeing their homes.

Upper Nile and Jonglei Regions

Populations in these regions currently depend on food aid distributions, but the regions have been hard to reach because of both insecurity and the heavy rains that have made landing at some airstrips impossible. The WFP/Technical Support Unit (TSU) in a recent assessment in Pochalla County found that the population is able to cross into Ethiopia to access relief grain from the refugees in the Pinyidu refugee camp.

Lakes Region

Here, options exist for obtaining food, such as trade with neighboring Western Equatoria Counties. Harvesting has reportedly begun in a few locations and greater food availability should improve food security further. However, the region is host to IDPs who fled fighting in Western Upper Nile, some of whom were not able to cultivate this year and hence remain vulnerable to food insecurity. In view of the strong kinship ties that exist in southern Sudan, these IDPs should be able to acquire food from the host population and engage in trade and labor exchanges to meet their food needs. Food aid distributions also continue and this should help the IDPs to cope.

1.2. 2002 Food-Security Assessments

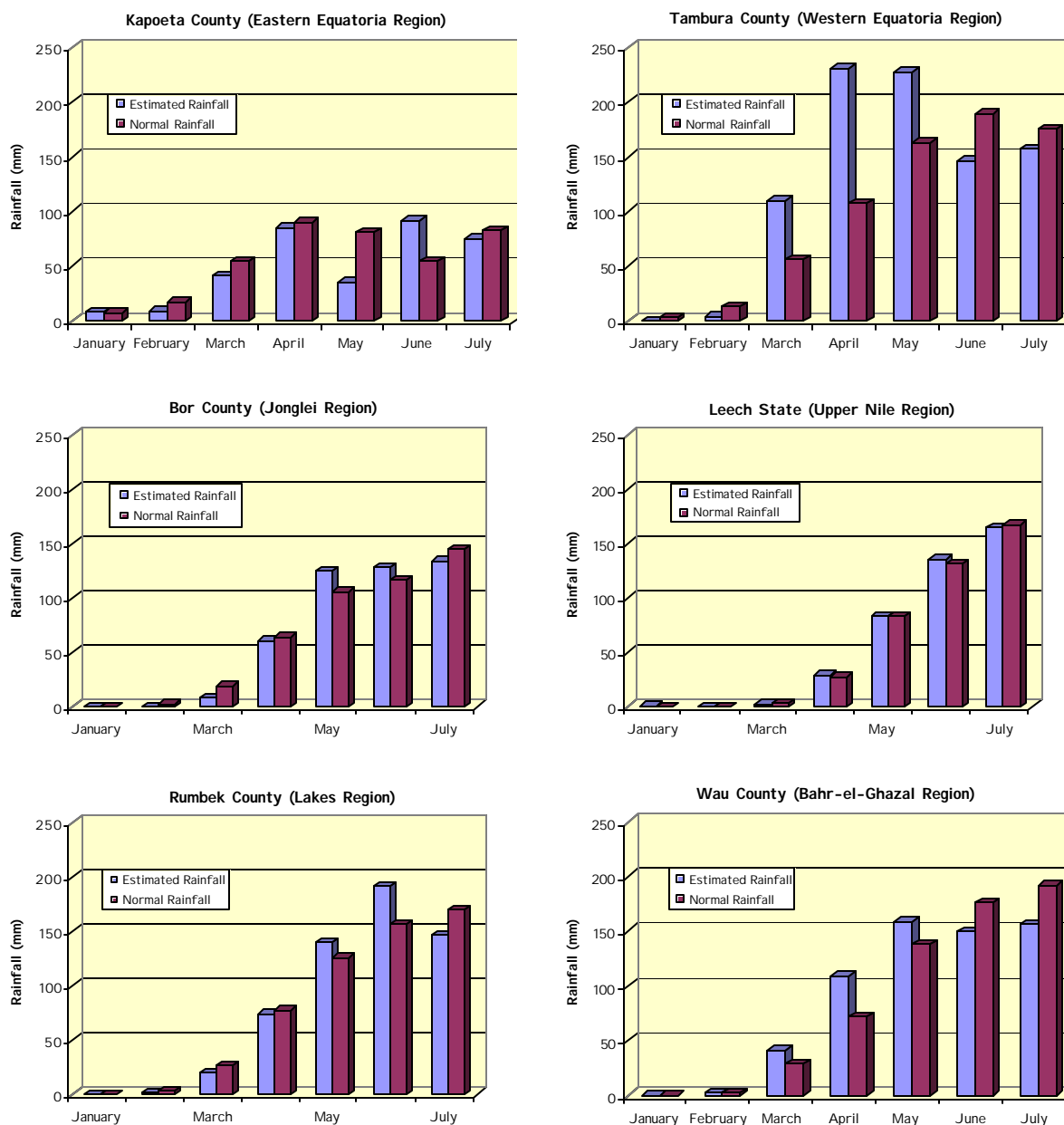
Plans are underway for the WFP-led Annual Needs Assessment (ANA) scheduled to begin in mid-September. The ANA will identify areas and categories of populations most likely to be food insecure in 2002. It will also predict the extent and intensity of food shortages and identify populations that will be forced to pursue distress strategies that may harm their productive capacity, thereby undermining their future food security. Once these groups are identified, it is imperative that donor agencies and NGOs in each area implement programs to mitigate the worst effects of these harmful strategies.

In each county/state, multiagency teams will visit selected sites. In all, about 50 sites will be chosen to reflect the diversity of livelihoods in southern Sudan and to ensure coverage of as large a proportion of the population as possible.

2. National Trends Affecting Parts of Southern Sudan

2.1. Agroclimatic Conditions

Heavy rains, first experienced in June in several locations, continued into July. Satellite imagery indicates heavier than normal precipitation in parts of Upper Nile and Bahr-el-Ghazal Regions during the second and third dekads (10-day periods), respectively. However, cumulative rainfall during the month remained below the seasonal average in most of the counties, as shown in Figure 2.

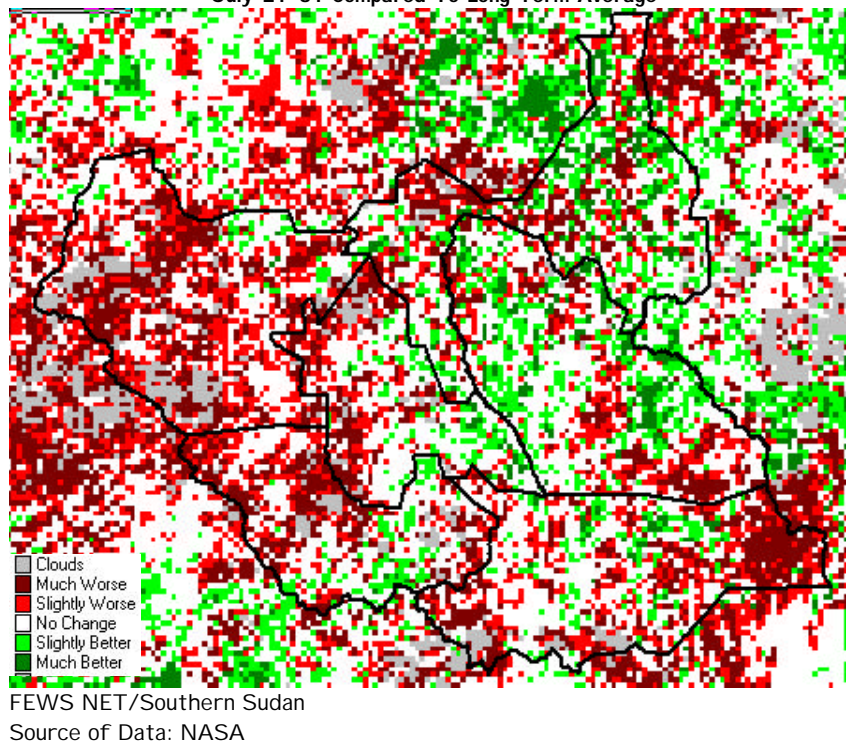
Figure 2: Rainfall in Southern Sudan, January – July 2001

FEWS NET/Southern Sudan
Source of Data: NOAA

Overall, in June and July, most locations experienced good cumulative rains but poor spatial and temporal distribution. The rains have been erratic in several locations — heavy rains over a few days followed by several days of dry conditions. The rainfall situation, however, has been less favorable in the Eastern Equatoria counties of Yei, Juba, and Kapoeta (shown in Figure 2). With the exception of July, the rains have fallen consistently below the expected levels since the season began in March. This will most likely have a negative impact on agricultural production in these areas this year.

Despite the below-average rains, vegetative conditions remain good in most regions. However, vegetative conditions are notably below the seasonal average in Bahr-el-Ghazal Region and neighboring areas in Western Equatoria Region. Equally affected are the semiarid areas of Kapoeta County. Figure 3 shows the vegetative conditions in the last dekad of July compared with the dekadal average. The poor vegetative conditions in Kapoeta County are unlikely to improve as the dry season sets in. This does not augur well for pastoralism because the next rains won't fall until the first quarter of 2002. Crops, which are of minimal importance, have failed and trade with neighboring pastoral locations in Kenya, which are equally affected by dry conditions, is and will remain limited.

Figure 3: Normalized Difference Vegetative Index for Southern Sudan
July 21–31 Compared To Long Term Average



2.2. Crop Production

Reports from the field suggest mixed crop performance. While crop performance is good and yields are likely to be high in the Western Equatoria and Lakes regions, crop failure is already being reported from parts of Eastern Equatoria Region. It is still too early to predict the likely crop outcome in parts of Bahr-el-Ghazal and Upper Nile regions, but prospects should be more apparent in the next month or two.

In Aweil East, Aweil West, and Twic (Bahr-el-Ghazal Region), and Leech, Phou, and Bieh States (Upper Nile Region), planting started late in some locations, in June/July instead of May, due to insecurity. Heavy rains have been experienced in these two regions in the last two months. Should these rains persist in August, the risk is high that flooding in lowland areas will destroy the crops. In Twic County, SUPRAID notes that low and erratic rains fell during May and June, and the heavy rains in July are of reduced benefit because crops had already been damaged. Chances of replanting are currently minimal because farmers lack additional seeds and because it may be too late in the season for crops to reach maturity.

Two factors — civil insecurity and erratic rainfall — will be influential in agricultural production this year in Bahr-el-Ghazal and Upper Nile Regions, with their intensity and impact determining yields. An Armyworm infestation reported in parts of Aweil East County is another factor at play, but the impact is localized. These factors need to be jointly monitored by FAO (as the lead agricultural agency), agricultural NGOs on the ground, and FEWS NET.

Good harvests are expected in Nimule and Labone in Eastern Equatoria Region. Consequently, CRS, which manages IDP camps in the region, is cutting rations for six months beginning in August for these two locations. The situation is different for New Cush and Ikotos in the same region. There, crop yields are likely to be low, following low and erratic rains this year. As a result, CRS will cut rations in these IDP camps for only two months, August and September.

2.3. Livestock Production

Livestock conditions continue to improve, thanks to the improved water and pasture availability as a result of the rains. *Vétérinaires Sans Frontières* (VSF)–Switzerland reports that in Bahr-el-Ghazal (Malualkon, Akak, and Turalei) and Leech State (Nyal and Ganyiel), animals are healthy and herders are driving most of them back to the highlands from the *toics* (dry-season grazing lands). This should improve milk availability for household members who stayed behind.

2.4. Health and Nutrition

Reports by NGOs indicate an increase in the numbers of malnourished children admitted to the feeding centers. In Aweil East County, TearFund reports an increase in new admissions in its supplementary feeding program. The population there currently depends on food aid; this dependence may well continue until harvesting begins in September/October. Similarly, MSF-Belgium reports an 18 percent increase in the numbers of children beneficiaries (its center also caters to adults) in its supplementary feeding program in Akobo (Bieh State, Jonglei Region) between the end of June and end of July. Given that the hunger period is likely to be extended in these areas because of late planting, people will need to use other options for getting food to supplement their food aid rations. Given the rains, fishing is currently a viable option in these locations. NGOs should make it a priority to provide people, where possible, with the necessary fishing equipment.

The delivery of health services in most parts of southern Sudan remains a challenge, and coverage is far from ideal. The health status of the population remains a concern, especially where insecurity precludes access by NGOs. Morbidity, which weakens children and prevents proper ingestion, digestion, and utilization of food, is currently suspected as a major cause of rising malnutrition. Despite food distributions and special targeting of families with malnourished children, the number of cases is on the rise. With the rains, water-borne illnesses, and malaria are posing a serious threat. MSF-France reports an unusually high prevalence of malaria in Akuem, Aweil West County, with at least one death per day. The reality of very limited health care and poor sanitary conditions continue to undermine efforts by nutrition agencies to improve nutritional conditions. A concerted effort is required to improve and intensify provision of medical services, educate the public on good hygiene practices, and improve existing water facilities in most of the locations.

2.5. Ongoing Food Aid Interventions

Food aid distribution remains an important relief activity and safety net and will continue at current levels in most parts of Bahr-el-Ghazal and Upper Nile Regions until the harvests in September/October. In Eastern Equatoria Region, CRS is implementing a six-month ration cut in the IDP camps it manages in Nimule and Labone, and a two-month ration cut in New Cush and Ikotos beginning August in response to the incoming harvests. The three food aid agencies in Eastern Equatoria — WFP, CRS, and Norwegian Peoples' Aid (NPA) — are distributing food as per planned schedules and no major breaks in the cereal pipeline are expected before the end of the year. The WFP pipeline is currently low on oil and Corn Soya Blend (CSB). Hence, WFP is distributing these scarce products to critical areas and projects only.